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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 002682

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SUBJECT: THE NINE JEWS OF BAGHDAD

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Robert Gilchrist for Reasons
1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: One of Baghdad's last remaining Jews, Khalida Kouada Liahu Moualim, described to poloff August 11 the continuing hardships faced by Iraq's now tiny Jewish community. She said that she is one of only nine Jews still living in Baghdad, and that she believes Jews do not live anywhere else in Iraq. She reported that the Jewish community in Baghdad has one hidden synagogue, no rabbi, and no formal leaders. While Moualim said that she suffered from discrimination and persecution under Saddam Hussein's regime, she reported that the situation for Jews in Baghdad has deteriorated significantly since 2003. Extremism and lawlessness have made their lives much more difficult. Moualim reported that on December 19, 2005, Al Qaeda in Iraq kidnapped and likely murdered her husband, whom she has not heard from since. She would like to leave Iraq as soon as possible. END SUMMARY.

THOSE WHO REMAINED IN IRAQ

¶2. (S/NF) Khalida Kouada Liahu Moualim, 44 years old, reported that she is one of nine Jews remaining in Baghdad. She speculated that her family has lived in Iraq for over 2,000 years, musing that they may have arrived during the first Babylonian captivity of 597 BCE. She named each of the eight other Jews who she claims remain in Baghdad, and reported that 31 Jews lived in Baghdad when the former regime fell in March 2003. Since then, she said that six have died, six have converted to Islam, and ten emigrated either to Israel or the United Kingdom. She knows of no other Jews living in any other part of Iraq. She specifically said that in Basra and Kurdistan, both of which she claims to have visited, Jews have either converted to Islam or fled.

¶3. (S/NF) Moualim recited prayers from memory in Hebrew; named major and minor Jewish holidays; and described in detail her experience of living as a minority in Iraq -- details which match similar experiences recounted to poloffs by Christians, Sabean-Mandaeans, Shabaks, and Yezidis. When asked why she did not convert to Islam or even Christianity in order to make her life easier, she said that she would never contemplate converting to another religion. She claimed to have had offers to marry Muslims and Christians in Baghdad, on condition that she convert to their religion, which she refused. When asked why her family stayed in Iraq after most members of the Jewish community, comprising approximately 120,000, left between 1948 and 1970, she said that her parents held good jobs and were afraid to leave.

¶4. (S/NF) According to Moualim, most of Baghdad's Jews live on or around Betawin Street, a poor area in the central Rusafa District. Betawin is near the famous commercial strip

along Abu Nuwas Street, and it abuts Baghdad's old Jewish Quarter. Moualim provided the following information on the other eight members of the Jewish community in Baghdad:

- Violet Shaul Touayik is Moualim's mother. She is 82 years old and very ill. She lives in Assina Street in Rusafa District with her daughter, Moualim, and her son, Thafer. She worked for many years as a physician. (NOTE: Moualim's father owned a clothes shop until his death in 1999. END NOTE.)
- Thafer Fouade Liahui Moualim is Moualim's brother. He is 45 years old and works as an orthopedist.
- Marcel Menahim Daniel is 77 years old and lives in Betawin Street, near the synagogue. She serves as the unofficial leader of the community, Moualim said.
- Naji Jebraeel is 71 years old and also lives in Betawin. He suffers from diabetes.
- Samir Naeem is 46 years old and is the brother of Moualim's husband.
- Amer Berchan is 40 years old and has family in the United Kingdom.
- Sami Berchan is 65 years old.
- Emad Levi is 40 years old.

A 50-year old woman in Betawin Street, Samira, reportedly converted to Islam after the fall of Saddam, as did a family of five. Moualim said that the members of this family will no longer speak to Jews in Baghdad. Of the six Jews who have died since 2003, Moualim explained that three died of old age, one from diabetes, one in a car accident, and one was kidnapped (her husband).

KIDNAPPED BY AL QAEDA IN IRAQ

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15. (S/NF) Moualim married Jacob Naeem in October, 2005 in a synagogue in Amman, Jordan. After returning to Baghdad, Moualim received a phone call on December 19, 2005 from someone claiming to be from Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), who said that his group had kidnapped her husband and would not release him unless the Government of Jordan freed an AQI captive (reportedly named Sajidah), and Coalition Forces left Iraq. Moualim said that the captor yelled anti-Semitic slurs at her, roughly translated as "Down with the Jews." Moualim offered to pay ransom, which the group refused, and then they threatened to cut her husband's head off and mail it to her. She has not heard again from the captors or her husband.

A LIFE OF FEAR AND EVASION

16. (S/NF) While Moualim said that she suffered from discrimination and persecution under the regime of Saddam Hussein, she reported that the situation for Jews in Iraq has deteriorated significantly since 2003. Extremism and lawlessness have made their lives much more difficult. She said that very few non-Jews in Iraq know she's Jewish. Public knowledge of her religious identity, Moualim explained, could expose her to curses, harassment, possibly the loss of her job, or even violent attack. When asked her religion by non-Jewish Iraqis, Maoulim has generally described herself as Christian or Muslim. She explained that she handles each situation differently, though she usually agrees with the questioner's assumption. If, for instance, she is asked, "Are you Muslim?," then she says yes. If she is asked, "Are you Christian?," then she also says yes. Since she does not wear a headscarf, she most often claims to be Christian. As a Christian in Baghdad, Maoulim said, she feels safer than she does as a Jew.

17. (S/NF) Moualim reported that she travels in Baghdad with her passport, which she uses instead of her identity card as

often as possible at checkpoints and other institutions. While Iraqi passports do not mention the bearer's religion, Iraqi ID cards do include this revealing detail. She showed her ID card and pointed out the size of the hand-written Arabic word for "Jewish," which was notably larger than the rest of the writing on the card. She said that an official purposely wrote this word larger to ensure that readers will notice it.

¶8. (S/NF) Moualim reported that Baghdad has one remaining synagogue, on Betawin Street. She said that the synagogue is old but has no outer markings to indicate that it is a house of worship, let alone a Jewish synagogue. Inside, Moualim said, it is very beautiful. She prays there alone, she explained, because the other Jews are too scared to join her. She said that praying in the synagogue helped her to cope with the grief of losing her husband.

¶9. (S/NF) After the kidnapping, Moualim left her job as a dentist at a government clinic. She said that only the clinic director knew she was Jewish, but nonetheless she no longer felt safe working there. She now works in an orphanage, where she said she has found a degree of contentment in helping vulnerable children. The director of the orphanage knows that Moualim is Jewish, and has offered her support and protection -- she provided Islamic religious texts for Moualim to show to extremists who threaten her.

ANXIETY ABOUT MEDIA ATTENTION

¶10. (S/NF) Moualim described an intense fear of publicity. She blames a non-governmental organization, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), for publishing her name in Arabic on the internet, as well as her mother's name and other identifying information. This information may have exposed her and her husband to danger, she said. She was extremely nervous to meet an American diplomat, and strongly requested that her identity be protected. (NOTE: Time magazine reported July 31 that Reverend Canon Andrew White, an Anglican Chaplain in Iraq, is in contact with eight Jews remaining in Baghdad, and that he has provided the group food and money. White told Time that the Baghdad Jews have not been able to agree to apply to go to Israel together, and one woman regularly goes to a Baghdad synagogue. END NOTE.)

FLEEING IRAQ

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¶11. (S/NF) Moualim would like to leave Iraq as soon as possible. She wants to emigrate to the Netherlands to join her two brothers who currently live there, but she said that she has struggled to earn permission to enter the country as a refugee. If her bid to emigrate to Holland fails, Moualim said that she would like to seek refugee status in the United States or Israel. She does not have ties in either of these countries, however, and said she prefers to move to a country where she has a familial base of support. Moualim said that she does not think that the elderly Jews remaining in Baghdad seek to leave Iraq, but she is not sure about the younger group.

¶12. (S/NF) Moualim said that HIAS approached her right after the fall of the former regime. She led this group to the other Jews still living in Baghdad. This group disappointed her, though, she said, after they promised take her to Vienna and then failed to do so. They figure in her mind among a group of non-governmental organizations that did not keep their promises to help her, her husband, and her family. Many of these groups took money from her, she said. One group charged her \$700, an extremely high sum in Iraq, to contact her husband's kidnappers. Her experiences with these groups have left her embittered and distrustful.

¶13. (S/NF) In addition to these groups, Moualim said, Reverend White also met her and offered his support to help her emigrate to Holland. She said that he provided her money to pay for a new passport that she could not afford, and claimed to have negotiated with the Dutch government on her behalf. He has not yet managed to obtain permission for her to enter the Netherlands. According to Moualim, White reported that the Dutch government said she must emigrate to Israel instead of Holland. She noted that White said he will continue trying to help her with this issue.

¶14. (S/NF) COMMENT: Moualim offered to provide pictures of the synagogue she attends, and has asked to attend religious services with Jewish members of the foreign service and the military. She would like to bring with her to these services some old Jewish-Iraqi prayer books. Post will continue contact with Moualim, and will provide as much assistance as she feels comfortable receiving. END COMMENT.
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